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PA/HO Department of State

E.O. 12958, as amended

September 6, 2007

Authority *NN D969000* DEPARTMENT OF STATEBy *JPL* *3/26/99* NT SECRETARY

AFN

19860

December 23, 1969

MEMORANDUM

TO : J - Under Secretary Johnson

THROUGH: S/S *RAD*FROM : AF - David D. Newsom *DD*SUBJECT: Conclusion of Agreement Regarding Wheelus  
INFORMATION MEMORANDUM

Our Embassy in Tripoli reports that agreement has been reached with the Libyans on a US withdrawal date from Wheelus (June 30, 1970) and on the arrangements designed to assure that the American withdrawal is dignified. Although the Libyans have proved to be hard bargainers, the atmosphere of the talks has remained cordial. An agreed minute is expected to be signed at 8:00 p.m., Tripoli time (1:00 p.m., our time) December 23.

Signing of the minute may coincide with the arrival of Nasser in Tripoli as a guest of the LARG. The Nasser visit, which is expected to last for two days, may also result in an announcement of closer Libyan-Egyptian political or military cooperation, perhaps extending to Sudan. Nasser's presence may also surface the fact that Egyptian troops, approximately 1,000, have been in Libya for about a week.

This combination of events may provoke domestic criticism of the Department for having agreed to negotiate for a US withdrawal from Wheelus at this particular time. If such criticism arises, the following replies may reasonably be made:

(1) The continued US presence at Wheelus, long after the conclusion of World War II, has been an increasing source of irritation in US-Libyan relations for several years. The new regime's request for a US withdrawal undoubtedly reflects significant Libyan popular feeling.

(2) The US wishes to establish with the new Libyan regime a basis for longer-term friendly relationships. A refusal to negotiate on the LARG's request that we withdraw would frustrate attainment of that objective.

(3) We saw no political advantage in delaying a negotiation on this problem; so far as we can determine, the present regime is the one with which we will have to deal over the foreseeable future. The British, who also agreed to negotiate

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BY S/S: *CS*DEF 15 *Libya-25*15-10 *Libya*

on their Base, and to withdraw by March 31, 1970, are of the same opinion.

(4) The British decision to withdraw by March 31, 1970, obviously made more difficult any US "hold-out" on Wheelus.

Because we recognize the legitimate concerns regarding the use to which the Base might be put once we withdraw, we are asking Ambassador Palmer to express these concerns to Captain Jaluud, the RCC member who leads the Libyan negotiating team. Hopefully, Jaluud will indicate to the Ambassador that the Base will not be transferred to the control of any third country after the US forces leave.